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February
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March
2022



SCORPIONS

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DESTROY



1976's 'Destroyer' album proved to be a game-changer for **Kiss**, elevating the New York four-piece from cartoonish novelty rock act to *bona fide* rock giants in what seemed like the blink of an eye. To celebrate this epic album *Paul Elliott* talked to main men **Paul Stanley** and **Gene Simmons** about making the record, renowned Kiss fanatic and metal writer *Geoff Barton* picked his five favourite Kiss tracks, and a panel of experts debated which are the greatest Kiss albums of them all...

KISS BEGAN RECORDING 'DESTROYER' in September of 1975, with the band sensing their monumental double live album 'Alive!' was about to break big. Eventually it rose all the way to number nine on the US Billboard album charts...

DID THE SUCCESS OF 'ALIVE!' CHANGE THE BAND'S MINDSET AS YOU WERE WORKING ON 'DESTROYER'?

PAUL STANLEY: "Kiss Alive! was a turning point because it really

captured the experience of being at a Kiss show from a sonic point of view. It immersed the listener in the crowd. Much to [manager] Bill Aucoin's credit the album became a mega success and a game changer for us as an international band."

GENE SIMMONS: "Even before 'Destroyer' came out we headlined huge gigs, so the live shows were bigger than the album sales, and with 'Alive!' they sort of caught up."

THE BAND'S FIRST THREE STUDIO ALBUMS – 'KISS', 'HOTTER THAN HELL', AND 'DRESSED TO KILL' – DIDN'T SET THE WORLD ALIGHT. WHY?

GENE: "I've heard that the first Led Zeppelin record was done in 18 hours, but in hindsight we never spent enough time in the studio. Even though great bands like The Beatles could record fast, there was still a lot of rehearsal. We barely did that, because we were always touring, and it was tough back then to say no to another show. 'They want us to play? Where? Let's go!' In the early days we were in station wagons, like the '60s English groups in their vans, and you'd drive 10 hours to a show and wouldn't think twice about it. That's just what you did. What everyone did. And in those early days we were doing two records of new material a year and touring the whole year. We just didn't have time to stay in the studio more than two or three weeks. You're touring, you write some songs, you get together, and you do a record. So with the first three records there was barely any production, hardly any overdubbing, it was just sort of bang it out. We didn't spend enough time getting decent sounds."

PAUL: "I was quite frustrated with all of our early

studio albums, because frankly they didn't come close to capturing what we were like live. And at that time I wasn't astute enough in the studio to know how to really capture that live sound. We left it to the people who were there. Live we were bombastic, like a runaway freight train, and those studio albums kind of sounded like a garage band."

SO AFTER THE SUCCESS OF 'ALIVE!', WHAT WAS THE PLAN FOR 'DESTROYER'?



Gene onstage in 1976 before the release of 'Destroyer'. "The live shows were bigger than the album sales."

"THERE WAS SO MUCH MATERIAL FLYING AROUND. WE WERE AT A SMALL DEMO STUDIO, A FOUR TRACK. PAUL AND I WERE THERE CONSTANTLY. ACE AND PETER DIDN'T PARTICIPATE."
GENE SIMMONS

PAUL: "Bill Aucoin was smart enough to say, 'You're going to have to follow this up with something amazing and credible, or you'll go back to where you were before.' That was pretty good foresight, so with that in mind we got in touch with the producer Bob Ezrin. I'd met Bob a few years earlier at a radio station studio in Toronto, where we talked in a stairwell! Bob was a super talent. You only have to listen to the pre-Bob Ezrin Alice Cooper records versus the post-Bob Ezrin Alice records to hear what he did. And as we worked with him it became much clearer how much he had to do with the parts and with the orchestration in Alice's songs. So yeah, we were on board to work with him, certainly. But we had no idea how – I don't want to say regimented, because it was a very creative process – but how structured and demanding Bob was."

GENE: "We were lucky that Bob Ezrin was producing that record. Because there was so much material and so many different ideas, it would have taken us quite a while to get it down. With our previous records, either Paul or myself would come in with a finished song – Paul would show me one of his songs and I might say, 'How about this riff?' In two or three hours it would be done, and you'd record it. It's like a train on a railroad track; you just keep chugging along, you keep moving forward, and you hope for the best. But 'Destroyer' was the first one where we took a little more time. We started recording, then went out on tour, and then came back and finished the record. It was a new way of working for us. And with Bob it was definitely a learning process. He actually taught us how to tune a different way!"



Paul in action, 1976. "When 'Destroyer' songs came up we spent more time looking at the fretboard than usual."

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE WRITING SESSIONS?

GENE: "There was so much material flying around. We were at a small demo studio, a four track. Paul and I were there constantly. Ace and Peter didn't participate. Sometimes they'd come down and help play a little bit, but other than that they never showed up. But Paul and I were constantly writing all kinds of stuff."

BUT TO PETER'S CREDIT HE DID CO-WRITE 'BETH', ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SONGS ON THE 'DESTROYER' ALBUM.

GENE: "There's an interesting story about 'Beth'. In the fall of '75 we went to Cadillac, Michigan, where the whole town dressed like Kiss, and it became 'Kiss Day' and all that stuff. And on our way over there Peter and I were in a car, and he started humming this melody. 'What's that?' 'Oh, that's a song I wrote.' I mean, Peter never wrote a song in his life! But, he says, 'It's a song called 'Beck'.' He sings, 'Beck I hear you calling...' I said, 'Yeah, that's pretty good, but why don't you sing it to Bob Ezrin and see if we can come up with an arrangement?' 'OK.' And I said, 'Before you play it for him, though, change it to 'Beth', because with Beck, people will think it's about Jeff Beck!' Also, Beck was supposed to stand for Becky, but that 'ck' sound stopped the fluency. "Beth I hear you calling..." - you can sing right through that. Beck didn't move as easily. So that's how 'Beth' was born."

THE ALBUM'S DEFINING SONG AND ITS OPENING TRACK IS 'DETROIT ROCK CITY'...

PAUL: "That was initially written as a homage and tribute celebrating Detroit, but the direction that the verses took, although not specifically directed by Bob, was led by his idea to get away from the 'f*ck me, suck me' lyrics and go for something deeper. So 'Detroit Rock City' kind of became a contrast between the verses, which are about somebody trying to make it to a rock concert and not getting there, and equally celebrating Detroit as a rock'n'roll mecca."

THE OTHER CORNERSTONE OF THE ALBUM IS 'GOD OF THUNDER', WHICH WAS WRITTEN BY PAUL, BUT WAS SUNG BY GENE...

PAUL: "Let me preface this. We'd understood and agreed that the role of the producer on this album was to have final say and make decisions. And when I played 'God Of Thunder' Bob immediately said, 'Oh, that's great, that one's for Gene!' I knew 'Detroit Rock City' was my song, but I also thought that 'God Of Thunder' was going to be my song. I envisioned it almost like a statement from the son of Zeus."

"'GOD OF THUNDER' IS SO MUCH A GENE SONG. BUT I HAVE THE SATISFACTION AND THE JOY OF KNOWING THAT THE SONG THAT PERSONIFIES GENE IS MINE!"

PAUL STANLEY

SO HOW DID IT FEEL TO GIVE UP THE TUNE?

PAUL: "Let's put it mildly. It was crushing and devastating! But I will say that Bob was absolutely right. It's so much a Gene song. But I have the

satisfaction and the joy of knowing that the song that personifies Gene is mine! And it would never have been as great a song if I'd sung it. Never. It's truly a highlight of who Gene is. Bob was right and Gene did a great job."

WERE YOU P*SSSED OFF WITH BOB AT THE TIME?

PAUL: "I was never fuming. I was just devastated. The idea of a song so quickly being passed off from me to someone else... It was difficult, and it remained a sore spot, even when I heard it finished. But it was undoubtedly a song for Gene. It was just that initial deflation after this anticipation I had of singing this great song. I think part of it had to do with the feeling of powerlessness, of not having a vote or any room for discussion. Because that was the way we set things up - and again, it was the right thing to do - and it proved itself quickly. Ultimately, that song has always been a staple of our show, and if I'd sung it then I don't think it would have had the gravitas or the longevity that it has."

GENE: "An interesting footnote on the song. The original version of 'God Of Thunder' obviously bore some resemblance to the finished version. But Ezrin rearranged it as much more of an up-tempo 'no space between the vocals' kind of a number, with, I might add, a disco beat on top of that!"

DID EZRIN BRING OUT SOMETHING DEEPER AS WELL AS BIGGER IN KISS MUSIC?

PAUL: "Certainly. It was musically and lyrically challenging. I can't say enough about Bob, because he opened my eyes and my ears in a way that I still think about and use to this day. And quite honestly, when we were making 'Destroyer' it was thrilling because we were pushing the boundaries, and Bob was really leading the charge into uncharted waters. It was very exciting to see what we were capable of doing."

GENE, YOUR SONG 'GREAT EXPECTATIONS' WAS PERHAPS THE BEST EXAMPLE OF THIS...

GENE: "Within the band at the time the verdict on that song was not unanimous. It was like, 'Gee, it's not really rock, is it?' You've got a children's choir, the Brooklyn Boys Choir, singing, 'You've got great expectations!' There were keyboards and a string quartet. It was certainly a leap. I don't know if it was forwards or sideways or whatever..."

EVEN WITH ALL THE GREAT ORIGINAL MATERIAL YOU HAD FOR 'DESTROYER' YOU STILL TRIED OUT A COVER OF THE SONG 'AIN'T NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS', WRITTEN BY TWO COUNTRY SONGWRITERS, BECKY HOBBS AND LEWIS ANDERSON. IT DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT FOR 'DESTROYER', BUT IT WAS LATER RECORDED BY THE BAND DETECTIVE.

GENE: "We took a whack at recording that song with Peter Criss on vocals. But we just didn't think it measured up."

WHEN THE ALBUM WAS FINISHED WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT IT?

GENE: "Because it had 'Beth', which appealed to a more



The Kiss line-up that recorded 'Destroyer'. Clockwise from top: Gene Simmons (vocals and bass), Peter Criss (drums and vocals), Ace Frehley (lead guitar and backing vocals), Paul Stanley (vocals and rhythm guitar)

"WHEN WE WERE MAKING 'DESTROYER' IT WAS THRILLING BECAUSE WE WERE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES, AND OUR PRODUCER BOB EZRIN WAS REALLY LEADING THE CHARGE INTO UNCHARTED WATERS. IT WAS VERY EXCITING TO SEE WHAT WE WERE CAPABLE OF DOING."

PAUL STANLEY

female audience, it was by some distance a more sophisticated record, instead of the straight meat and potatoes – or meat and two veg, as you say – stuff that we did before. It was a Kiss record, but there were new elements in it. So we weren't sure..."

PAUL: "Although 'Destroyer' didn't have the power of 'Kiss Alive!' sonically, it expanded who we were musically and also kind of helped to define the characters. Bob Ezrin very much understood the sensibility of the listener, and he also understood the idea of solidifying the individual characters as much as possible. But I must say that when the album was done and I played it for some people who were big fans, they weren't initially crazy about it. They didn't

find it heavy enough. And coming on the heels of 'Kiss Alive!', which really captured the rawness of the band, I understand. But we did what we needed to do."

THE 'DESTROYER' COVER ARTWORK, PAINTED BY FANTASY ARTIST KEN KELLY, IS ONE OF THE CLASSIC KISS IMAGES.

GENE: "Initially we approached a different artist, Frank Frazetta, but he was much too expensive. So in the end we got Ken Kelly, who's actually Frank Frazetta's cousin. The first painting he did had us in the stage outfits we had at the time, but by the time the record was about to come out we'd changed outfits, so Ken had to repaint it. We didn't have the luxury of standing still. It's difficult to understand what the scenery looks like if the train keeps moving all of the time."

AND AFTER 'DESTROYER' WAS RELEASED ON 15 MARCH 1976, YOU WERE BACK OUT ON THE ROAD AGAIN, WITH THE BAND'S FIRST TRIP TO THE UK AND EUROPE.

PAUL: "For us England was The Holy Land, the home of

The Beatles and Led Zeppelin! But in all honesty once we got there it wasn't always pleasurable, because at that time Europe really hadn't come to fall in line with the idea of availability of things like the States. And not being able to communicate readily with people back home, because of the high cost of phone calls and the quality of the technology at that point, was really tough for us. We certainly had fun on that trip, but like a lot of our early days it was filled with work."

WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU FIND WEIRD ABOUT ENGLAND?

GENE: "I remember asking for ice for my Coca Cola and they brought a spoon and dropped one solitary cube in! I also remember being in a car and asking them to turn on the air conditioning, and they go, 'Oh, you're American!' And I'll never forget the toilet seats. They barely held my ass when I sat on them. They were made for extremely small human beings. I'd never seen that before! But with all that said, it was a truly magical trip. And that went for every country we went to in Europe, to be honest."

WHEN YOU WERE OVER HERE, HOW DID THE BRITISH MEDIA TREAT YOU?

PAUL: "We accomplished what we wanted to, in the sense that the people who came to see our shows really loved what they saw. The rest is just critics, take it or leave it. Anyone who doesn't pay for a ticket has a less important opinion as far as I'm concerned. There were certain critics who dismissed us, and that's like being Scrooge or the party pooper, there's no fun or joy in that. But we had a great ally in Geoff Barton at *Sounds*, who jumped on the bandwagon and did it with the joy and the innocence of a pure fan, as opposed to getting caught up in being overly concerned with what someone else thinks."

ON THE EUROPEAN TOUR YOU HAD A SCALED-DOWN STAGE PRODUCTION...

PAUL: "It wasn't a huge show, but I had no problem with that. We'd been in the same situation in the US not too long before."

GENE: "We didn't care. The stage show was only there to embellish the music."



"BECAUSE IT HAD 'BETH', WHICH APPEALED TO A MORE FEMALE AUDIENCE, 'DESTROYER' WAS BY SOME DISTANCE A MORE SOPHISTICATED RECORD, INSTEAD OF THE STRAIGHT MEAT AND POTATOES STUFF THAT WE DID BEFORE."

GENE SIMMONS

YOU WERE PLAYING A FEW SONGS FROM 'DESTROYER'; 'DETROIT ROCK CITY', 'FLAMING YOUTH', 'SHOUT IT OUT LOUD'...

PAUL: "It was funny, because there were more intricate parts to those 'Destroyer' songs than we were used to, and when it came time to play them I have to say we planted our feet firmly on the stage until we felt comfortable. When those songs came up we spent more time looking at the fretboard than usual!"

WE HEARD A STORY THAT WHEN YOU RETURNED TO THE STATES TO COMPLETE THE 'DESTROYER' TOUR, THERE WAS A SHOW WHEN GENE FELL HEAD-OVER-STACK-HEELS DURING THE OPENING NUMBER!

GENE: "Yes, it was quite something to behold..."

PAUL: "The show began with all this smoke and fog on stage, and as we started 'Detroit Rock City' Gene and I came running down the stairs on either side of the drum riser. So we're in eight-inch heels, playing an instrument, and running down these stairs. And I just remember Gene disappearing in the fog! He disappeared as if there were more stairs, but there weren't any more stairs! Nobody could see him for a second or two. I thought he was down for the count. And then all of a sudden he came leaping out of the fog."

GENE: "I fell pretty hard, but you know the old saying: the show must go on!"

WHEN THE TOUR FINISHED IN SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS ON 12 SEPTEMBER 1976, DESTROYER HAD GONE GOLD AND WAS SOON TO GO PLATINUM.

GENE: "'Beth' was the key. Even though 'Detroit Rock City' was released as a single, the B-side was 'Beth', and 'Beth' became the big hit."

WHEN YOU LOOK BACK ON 'DESTROYER' NOW, WAS IT EVERYTHING YOU HOPED IT WOULD BE?

GENE: "It's one of our better records, for sure."

PAUL: "It was a cinematic album. It was atmospheric and visual when you heard that music. And it was pivotal in that it opened our eyes - certainly it opened *my* eyes - to what was possible." 🍷

FIVE MONSTERS



The legendary *Sounds* music paper writer and acknowledged Kiss fanatic Geoff Barton, pictured above with the band, chooses his all-time favourite numbers by the boys...



1. 'DETROIT ROCK CITY' FROM 'DESTROYER', 1976

I tried to resist, but I couldn't. I attempted to hide the iced donut, but the goddamn dog sniffed it out. When compiling this selection, I didn't want to opt for the bleedin' obvious. But if I *hadn't* included this particular track, questions would undoubtedly have been asked in Kiss Parliament. "Does the honourable member for Michigan agree with the exclusion of 'Detroit Rock City' from this clueless writer's preposterous list?" "No, Mr Speaker, I most certainly do not. In fact, it's an abomination." "Then let us sentence him to 100,000 years imprisonment, during which he will be forced to listen to Peter Criss's 'That's The Kind Of Sugar Papa Likes' on continuous tape-loop." Blimey, I think I'd prefer death by a thousand Simmons tongue-lashes. Anyhow, let me tell you a story. Way back in the mid-'70s when I started writing for *Sounds* music weekly, I was still living with my mum and dad. One weekend Auntie Pam and Uncle David came round to visit. Pam asked me: "So what exactly is this weird heavy metal music you're so obsessed with writing about?" Somewhat lost

for words, I plonked a copy of Kiss's 'Destroyer' album on the turntable. Pam listened to the opening track, 'Detroit Rock City' and proclaimed, "Oh, so it's all about screeching tyres and car crashes, is it?" And, in a strange kind of way, she was right...



2. 'HOTTER THAN HELL'/'FIREHOUSE' FROM 'ALIVE!', 1975

Here's a dose of Skynyrd-style double trouble: two Kiss tracks for the price of one, meaning our Top Five is really a Top Six. Is this cheating? Yes, indubitably. Please file your complaints direct to the editor. By way of explanation, allow us to quote Greek philosopher Aristotle. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Because, separately, neither 'Hotter Than Hell' nor 'Firehouse' – studio versions – would have made this illustrious list. But when tethered together in an in-concert context, as heard on 'Alive!', well, the word 'gargantuan' springs to mind. The climax, of course, comes when the sirens wail, Ace's guitar howls like a castrated werewolf, and Paul shrieks "FIE-ERR-HAUSE!" before chucking his Kiss Firehat into the crowd. Listen carefully and you can hear said hat splintering the forehead of one lucky fan; these days it would likely be a mediocre papier-mâché experience. And let's not forget sibling 'Hotter Than Hell', one of Kiss's classic sloth-like stompers that – yes – burns ya like the midday sun! Note that the satin and lace-clad subject of Paul's 'HTH' affections is "gonna leave you well done," in the manner of a charred BBQ sirloin. Oh, the romance.



3. 'GOD OF THUNDER', LIVE IN DUBAI, 31 DECEMBER 2020

This is *it*. The single song that defined – and continues to define – the goblin-chomping persona of Kiss's self-styled Demon. Here be Gene the bat-winged behemoth; the tempestuous tongue-meister; the man who once asked – or more like demanded – "What is my charisma?!" In our opinion, 'God Of Thunder' – referencing Kiss's live treatment and interpretation of the song – has improved over time. Of course, on the 'Destroyer' album it remains a Hammer-horror delight, sonic supremo Bob Ezrin maxing out the vibe of dread and dismay, the screaming children and sundry scary FX causing grown men to tremble in their pixie boots. But compare and contrast the band's crude early onstage treatment of 'GOT' to the way it's performed currently. We urge you to check out a YouTube snippet of Kiss's show in Dubai from New Year's Eve 2020. Boy, what a pulse-pounding production, characterised by dozens of miniature close-ups of Gene's frazzled fizzog hovering above the stage, gibbering like infernal Teletubbies. Interestingly, to appease the UAE authorities, there is... wait for it... no blood! What's more, the phrase "virgin soul" is replaced by "sacred soul". But the clip is still more frightening than spending an evening with Linda Blair wearing her head back-to-front. And to think it's actually a Paul Stanley composition...



4. 'WIPED-OUT' FROM 'ACE FREHLEY', 1978

New Kiss albums came at you thick and fast in the 1970s. The band's eponymous debut, for example, was released in February 1974, with follow-up album 'Hotter Than Hell' arriving a mere morsel of months later, in October of that same year. And what did I most look forward to upon purchasing a freshly recorded long-player by Messrs Simmons, Stanley, Criss, and Frehley? Why, tracks with the latter as star performer, of course. Songs like 'Beth', meanwhile, were w-a-a-a-y down the list. Frankly, my Top Five/Six could've contained all manner of Ace-fronted songs, including 'Rocket Ride' (although the lyric "Baby's on her knees, baby wants to please" hasn't, shall we say, dated too well); the jolting 'Shock Me', the massively underrated 'Dark Light', or even Russ Ballard's 'New York Groove', which Frehley claimed as an anthem all of his own. But I've plumped for 'Wiped-Out' from his 1978 solo album because it's just so lurching, so stumbly, so autobiographical, so Ace. In other words, it sums up the Spaceman's combustible character perfectly. The story behind the song: Our hero goes to a party, quaffs countless glasses of wine, switches to rum and becomes "blind as a skunk." Despite said visual impairment he spies a beautiful woman, takes her hand, and tries to stand – but ends up sitting down. Hell, we've all been there. There's nothing like a comfy armchair.



5. 'TONIGHT YOU BELONG TO ME' FROM 'PAUL STANLEY', 1978

"When you see Paul Stanley it becomes clear quickly that you have seen him before, felt his body next to yours in the shadows of your imagination. Artists of the Renaissance and medieval times tried to capture his features in their oil paintings. The Romans and Greeks built statues in his likeness. He is the classic face and sensuous body art can only imitate. Is it becoming clear? As you think about it, the truth becomes even more real. Paul Stanley has always existed. He is timeless. He is the past. He is the future. He soothes us, lives our dreams, and makes our fantasies come true." Confession time. I'd love to claim credit for that fabulously florid fragment of verbiage. The truth is, it's culled from an ancient Kiss tour programme, writer unknown. But has any passage of prose ever summed up The Starchild better? We suggest you memorise those words and then recite them enthusiastically while listening to 'Tonight You Belong To Me' from Paul's 1978 solo album. The result could well be orgasmic. 'Tonight...' is Stanley to a tee, a sensuous-yet-savage offering that begins in tearful falsetto and ends in all-out mayhem. A *bona fide* masterpiece that makes your luxuriant chest-rug hairs stand to attention. In fact, I can see them now, poking through my T-shirt... (Too much detail – Ed.)



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

We brought together five acknowledged **Kiss** experts and fanatics to try to decide on the best albums the band have produced in their career of almost 50 years...

THE PANEL

Michael Brandvold – Former Kiss webmaster and host of the much-loved Kiss podcast *Three Sides Of The Coin*.

Larry Mazer – Erstwhile Kiss manager.

Frank Novinec – Guitarist with Hatebreed, and Kiss obsessive.

Ross Sampson – *Rock Candy Mag's* digital supremo and lifelong Kiss fan.

Mark Cicchini – Rabid Kiss collector and *Three Sides Of The Coin* cohort.

MICHAEL BRANDVOLD: "So I'm going to kick this round table discussion about what the greatest Kiss albums of all time are by putting one seminal release straight on the table for debate – and that's the album that first brought the band to mainstream attention in the US – 'Alive!'..."

FRANK NOVINEC: "I'm a major fan of 'Alive!'. It's arguably one of the greatest live albums of all time. Back when it was first released in 1975 we didn't know that it wasn't *all* live, but who cares? All bands tinker with things for their live albums. What matters to me is that Kiss was one of the first bands to make their mark with the concept of a double live album, and I'd put 'Alive!' right up there with 'Frampton Comes Alive!' and 'Double Live Gonzo!' by Ted Nugent."

LARRY MAZER: "I'll give an honourable mention to 'Alive!' for sure. That album was an important part of that whole era of incredible double lives that started with Humble Pie's 'Performance Rockin' The Fillmore' in 1971 and culminated with 'Frampton Comes Alive!' in 1976."

ROSS SAMPSON: "The first album you discover by a band has a particular resonance, so 'Alive!' will always be special to me. I still remember reading Geoff Barton's review of it in [British weekly music newspaper] *Sounds* and being captivated by this report on a band I knew nothing about. I hadn't heard a single Kiss song at that point, but after reading that review and looking at the picture of Gene Simmons I knew I *had* to own 'Alive!'. I was a comics fan, so I was immediately drawn to the personas of the four band members, because to me they looked like musical superheroes. I ordered 'Alive!' from the States because I can only assume now that the review was of an import copy, and I can still remember listening to the album for the first time when it finally arrived. The opening song, 'Deuce', hooked me at once and I instantly became a Kiss fan. 'Alive!' has to be one of the top live releases of all time alongside Thin Lizzy's 'Live And Dangerous', UFO's 'Strangers In The Night', and 'Frampton Comes Alive!'. It's still an album I listen to today and it still sounds exciting from start to finish."

MARK CICCHINI: "I live in Detroit, where Kiss first took off, and when they hit it really was like a tidal wave. So that's just one of the reasons why 'Alive!' is *everything* to me. I was 10 years old back in 1975 and my older brother had bought 'Hotter Than Hell' in the fall of '74, so I was already aware of what Kiss was about. But it wasn't until 'Alive!' came out that the floodgates really opened. I

was like 'Holy cow! This is *it!*' and I never looked back. I loved Bachman Turner Overdrive and I loved Sweet, and if you think about, if you meld those bands together, you end up pretty much where Kiss was at the time of 'Alive!'. That album is loud, it's flamboyant, and it's fun. Nothing is more *fun* than 'Alive!'. I look at my iPad and my iPad doesn't lie. 'Alive!' is the Kiss album I go to time and again. When you're listening to 'Alive!' you realise that while the Kiss image is important, at the end of the day it's all about the music. When you're checking out 'Deuce' and you hear 'Get up and get your grandma outta here,' well you know that Paul Stanley means what he says. There is absolutely no bullsh*t on 'Alive!'. From start to finish it's the greatest live album of all time. And when you think of some of the competition - Aerosmith's 'Live! Bootleg', Deep Purple's 'Made In Japan', Ted's 'Double Live Gonzo!' - that's really some statement."

FRANK: "'Alive!' is simply undeniable. The way that thing *sounds!* If you're going to have a party then it's the perfect record to put on to get things started. The songs were raw, and the band was hungry. You can hear it in the grooves!"

MICHAEL: "Legions of Kiss supporters do love 'Alive!', of course, but there will be tons of fans who insist that 'Destroyer' will always be the greatest Kiss album of all time..."



LARRY: "'Destroyer' is without doubt my number one Kiss album by far. Why? Because Bob Ezrin brought something incredible to the table, production-wise, and he had a lot to do with making sure that album was full of cream without much in the way of cereal. There was a fair amount of cereal on the previous three studio albums! When I was managing Kiss in the late '80s and early '90s I had a lot to do with getting Bob Ezrin back in the fold for the 'Revenge' album. Having watched him work on songs with the band it's easy to see why he had such an impact on 'Destroyer'. For me that record defines the golden era of Kiss."

ROSS: "I don't think there's any other Kiss album that's as perfectly Kiss as 'Destroyer'. The songs, the cover, the band image...everything was a step up from anything the group had done before. It moved the band onto a whole other level in terms of song composition and especially song arrangement. 'Destroyer' has my favourite album cover of all time, and it contains my favourite song of all time, 'Detroit Rock City', so the bar is set pretty high. Getting hold of the 45th anniversary edition of 'Destroyer' recently reminded me of just how good an album it is. I listened to all of the many versions of the tunes on the deluxe edition and what's abundantly clear is that at their core they're just fantastic songs."

MICHAEL: "But here's the point for me. Without Bob Ezrin taking songs like 'Detroit Rock City' and 'Shout It Out Loud' and doing what he did with them in terms of orchestration and audio additions and arrangements, I don't think we'd be here talking about Kiss today. You listen to an original demo of, say, 'Detroit Rock City', and then you listen to the album version that Ezrin signed off... different song, way more grandiose. You can't go

wrong with 'Destroyer', especially because it includes 'Flaming Youth', which to me is one of the greatest Kiss songs, a rallying cry for the band's fans to stand up and be proud of what they listen to. 'Destroyer' is a blueprint of what Kiss is all about."

LARRY: "Great songs are always the common denominator for every great band. If you look at 'Destroyer' - from 'Detroit Rock City' to 'Great Expectations' to 'Do You Love Me' - the songs are amazing. It's a brilliant record."

MARK: "Everyone talks about 'Destroyer', but the album that followed it, 'Rock And Roll Over', holds a special place in my heart, because it was the first Kiss record I bought with my own money. I really like the way that record sounds and, honestly, I like it better than 'Destroyer', because it's rawer. Song-wise, is there anything more quintessentially Kiss than the opening riff of 'Makin' Love'? And who can resist the grind of 'Calling Dr. Love'? Paul was on fire writing for 'Rock And Roll Over', coming up with short, sharp rock'n'roll songs like 'Mr. Speed' and 'Take Me'. It's just a fantastic, fun, record."

MICHAEL: "I'm a big fan of 'Rock And Roll Over'. It was the first Kiss album I bought as well. The whole album is a very solid, hard, in-your-face piece of work. It's not quite as polished as 'Destroyer', but the songs are all on point. 'Makin' Love'? That tune just slaps you across the face! There's nothing I can find that's wrong with 'Rock And Roll Over'. Absolutely nothing. I was fortunate that the very first Kiss album I bought was also such a great, solid Kiss album. When I listen to 'Rock And Roll Over' I hear a band saying, 'Don't worry, we got this now.' That's the confidence that developed out of making 'Destroyer'."

LARRY: "I'd also stake a claim for 'Love Gun' as a record that's not a million miles behind 'Destroyer'. That album was produced by Eddie Kramer, who's one of my favourite producers of all time. Both sonically and song-wise, 'Love Gun' was a very, very strong record."

MICHAEL: "A lot of hardcore Kiss fans would make a case for 'Creatures Of The Night' being right up there with the band's greatest work too..."

FRANK: "I'd been a huge Kiss fan, but I'd lost a little interest during the 'Unmasked' and (Music From) 'The Elder' period. But as soon as I saw the video for 'I Love It Loud' from 'Creatures...' - and the band's painted faces on the cover of the album - they reeled me right back in again. I was 11 or 12 years old at the time and didn't know any of the internal politics that were affecting the band at that time. Peter Criss had been replaced by Eric Carr, and we didn't know that Ace was definitively out of the band as well, especially because his face was on the cover of 'Creatures...' All I knew was that the songs were damn good compared to the previous couple of albums. Don't get me wrong. I love 'Unmasked' and '(Music From) The Elder'. But 'Creatures...' was *different*. It felt more like Kiss being Kiss. It rejuvenated my energy for being a Kiss fan."

MARK: "I went to see Kiss on the 'Creatures Of The

Night' tour and because Detroit had always supported Kiss 'I Love It Loud' was being played on the radio here, even though the band was in a commercial slump. So the Kiss show in Detroit on the 'Creatures...' tour was still a big deal, and that night you could see and hear that the songs from 'Creatures...' were better than anything the band had come up with in a while. That album got Kiss out of the rut they were in. At the time Van Halen was huge, and Ozzy Osborne was coming back as a solo artist after Black Sabbath. Those guys were putting out big hard rock records, but 'Creatures Of The Night' showed everybody that Kiss could play as loud and as fast as anybody else. I remember calling a friend as soon as I heard 'Creatures...' and telling him, 'They're back baby. They're back!' What's funny, though, is that the album that came after 'Creatures...' was 'Lick It Up'. It was the first Kiss album without the make-up, and it was way more commercially successful than 'Creatures...' But as far as I'm concerned it wasn't as good."

FRANK: "Any Kiss fan will tell you that 'Creatures Of The Night' is an absolute connoisseur's favourite. The band was trying to re-establish itself after the commercial disaster that was '(Music From) The Elder', and for me they did just that! You put 'Creatures...' on your turntable and your jaw just drops. There isn't a bad song on 'Creatures' and alongside 'Revenge' it's surely the heaviest record Kiss have ever made."

MARK: "'Creatures Of The Night' took Kiss to another level. It pretty much *had* to do that, though, because if the band hadn't taken that next step, then I don't think we'd be here discussing them today. Much like the first Montrose album, 'Creatures...' didn't sell all that well when it first came out. But all these years later everyone says what an incredible album it is."

MICHAEL: "It took another couple of years before the band could start to punch again commercially, but 'Creatures...' felt like a breath of fresh air! It gave us fans faith and confidence in the band once more. The real problem, though, seemed to be that a lot of people weren't looking beyond the make-up. Nobody was prepared to give the actual music a chance."

FRANK: "Moving on, I'd like to throw a weird one into the mix as a personal favourite Kiss album – 'Animalize'. No doubt a lot of people will be surprised by that, but Kiss were touring that album when I saw them for the first time in '84 and I don't think that record gets its due. Paul was carrying the load at that time, so 'Animalize' feels like a Paul record to me, but I think he did a great job, especially with his production. Unfortunately, the 'Animalize' album was all we really got to see of Mark St. John as a guitarist, but I really enjoyed his contributions."

MICHAEL: "Just like with Frank's choice of 'Animalize', there probably aren't many people who will agree with me on this, but I believe 'Crazy Nights' is a special Kiss album. There's no theme or concept and it's about nothing but a good time. But Kiss isn't about being depressed, which is why I'm no fan of their 'Carnival Of Souls' album. Kiss is about rocking and rolling all night and partying every day. 'Crazy Nights' fits the bill perfectly and to this day I still go back to it when I need something to give me a kick in the ass and make me smile. Like 'Animalize', 'Crazy Nights' feels like a Paul Stanley Kiss album, but I feel that both lyrically and vocally Gene was much better on 'Crazy Nights' than he'd been on all the previous Kiss non-make-up albums."

LARRY: "Well this is definitely a selfish choice, given that I was managing the band for this one, but I'm going to stake a claim for 'Revenge' as a classic."

MICHAEL: "Good call Larry. When I first heard 'Revenge' it was another 'Creatures Of The Night', 'Holy crap! They're back!' moment for me."

LARRY: "I was involved with 'Revenge' from top to bottom, both musically and artistically. For my money it met the big demand I'd made of the band when I first started

managing them, and that was that Gene Simmons had to come back creatively and be an equal contributing member of Kiss. In my first meeting with the band, I was adamant about what needed to change, and I think Gene was surprised when I was so in his face about it. Thankfully he agreed with me, and I think he was ready to commit again too. I don't know if Paul was ready for it, but Gene came back all-guns-blazing. A lot of the guitar-driven riffs on 'Revenge' are very strong and I think Vinnie Vincent deserves some credit for his songwriting contributions. The previous Kiss album, 'Hot In The Shade' – which I came in on after it was recorded – had been put together with a tired team of songwriters. It came out at the time with a sticker on it saying '15 great Kiss songs'. Of course, what it should have said on that sticker was 'Three great Kiss songs and 12 pieces of crap.' Thank God 'Forever' was on there, which Paul co-wrote with Michael Bolton. I was able to get that one away as a hit single. But part of the problem with that record was that there was no outside producer telling Gene and Paul that this song was great, and that song was terrible. The previous studio album, 'Crazy Nights', was head and shoulders above 'Hot In The Shade'; 'Reason To Live' and 'Crazy Crazy Nights' were both great Kiss songs. But on 'Hot In The Shade' Gene and Paul decided to self-produce, so there was no adult in the room saying, 'Hey, these are average songs.' On 'Revenge' you had Bob Ezrin and you had me, and I think that's one of the things that made 'Revenge' a much better record than 'Hot In The Shade'. Mind you, I had to fight tooth and nail



to get the band to agree to release 'Unholy' as the first single. And then to my great regret I failed to convince them to go with 'Domino' as the second single. I was shut down because of inter-band politics. Gene didn't want to hurt Paul's feelings with a second Simmons composition getting released as a single after 'Unholy'. I thought that was ridiculous. But I didn't get my way, and they went with a Paul Stanley song called 'I Just Wanna'. The record peaked somewhere around 700,000 sales, but to this day I'm convinced that if we'd gone with 'Domino' second then we would've had a platinum album. But I'm still very proud of 'Revenge'. I think in 50 years' time people will still be talking about it as one of Kiss's greatest albums."

ROSS: "This is definitely a controversial choice, but I think that 'Sonic Boom' should get more credit than it does. I was lucky enough to be invited to a launch party for the album in Amsterdam and I remember there was an unveiling of the album sleeve. As with 'Alive!' I was pretty much sold on the project simply looking at the cover. But at the end of the day it all comes down to the songs, and I *really* liked the songs on 'Sonic Boom'. They're very strong – way stronger than the songs on, say, 'Hot In The Shade'. I felt in some ways that 'Sonic Boom' was an album where Kiss were all about proving themselves again, and I think I've seen Paul saying as

much in interviews I've read. I know 'Sonic Boom' isn't an album that most Kiss fans would pick as a favourite, but I've always loved it, and for me the proof of the pudding is in the fact that it's an album I still play today."

MARK: "'Sonic Boom' freakin' rules. It shows all the same traits as the albums that made me fall in love with Kiss in the first place. This is the sound of a band not trying to write hit singles and simply playing four-to-the-floor hard rock songs. A lot of fans don't seem to understand just how great the album is from start to finish. It's very thematic, very well written and very well played. And let me just say that Tommy Thayer smokes on 'Sonic Boom'. Hate me all you want, but 'Sonic Boom' features some of the best guitar playing on *any* Kiss record. I love the 'Monster' album too, but 'Sonic Boom' just *sounds* that little bit better to me."

MICHAEL: "Well it's been a great debate, gentlemen, thank you for your contributions. I guess in summing up what I should say is that ultimately there is no right and wrong when it comes to the best Kiss albums of all time. We're all fans of this incredible band, and whatever album means the most to you is just fine by us..."

LARRY: "Even if it is 'Hot In The Shade'!" 🍌

THE PANEL'S VERDICT



MICHAEL BRANDVOLD

"'Rock And Roll Over' is the best Kiss album, because it has solid hard rock songs from top to bottom, aided and abetted by an amazing rock production. The album brings me back to a time and place of great memories."

LARRY MAZER

"My number one pick is 'Destroyer', thanks to its superb production by Bob Ezrin, who also had great influence on the final track listing. 'Detroit Rock City' is a rock anthem for the ages that will outlast us all."

FRANK NOVINEC

"As someone who celebrates the entire Kiss catalogue it's safe to say the songs, production, artwork, and importance of 'Destroyer' remain unmatched in the band's extraordinary catalogue of music."

ROSS SAMPSON

"'Alive!' totally captures the bombast, power, and majesty of Kiss. Even though it's several concerts amalgamated, the 16 tracks gel as one magnificent, cohesive whole. When I first heard this album I knew I'd be a Kiss fan for life and 'Alive!' still gives me goosebumps today. Rock music of such unforgettable quality will live forever."

MARK CICCHINI

"'Alive!' represents the alpha and the omega of hard rock live albums. The anticipation at the start of the album when you hear *"You wanted the best, you got the best!"* becomes a reality as soon as the music kicks in. The music is always set not to 10, but rather to *stun!* The first time I listened to this album in the fall of 1975 I remember feeling drained, happy – and a fan for life!"



"I BECAME A METALHEAD!"

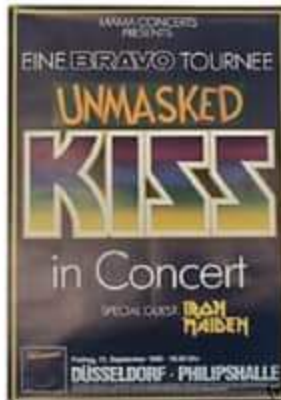


KREATOR GUITARIST AND VOCALIST MILLE PETROZZA EXPLAINS HOW A DOUBLE LIVE WHAMMY OF KISS AND IRON MAIDEN IN HIS NATIVE GERMANY FIRST TURNED HIM ON TO THE GLORIES OF HEAVY METAL...

"I WAS ONLY 12 years old when I went to see Kiss on the 'Unmasked' tour at the Philipshalle arena in Düsseldorf. At the time Kiss was the only band I was interested in. I collected everything I could find on them, cutting photos of the group out of magazines and putting them up on my bedroom wall. My older cousin took me to the show, because my parents were really worried that I'd get beaten up by a biker gang for some strange reason. That's what they thought happened when you went to a rock concert!

"IRON MAIDEN was the support act, but I hadn't heard of them before and so knew nothing at all about the band. I saw the last five songs of their set and had never heard anything like it! I was really into what they were doing, though, especially when the band's monster Eddie came out onstage at the end of the set. I was just a kid at the time, so that sort of thing really excited me. But I liked the music they were playing, too, because it was really heavy. I recognised that Maiden had a punk edge, but to my ears they were so much better than any punk band. I was never into punk.

"I enjoyed Iron Maiden's set so much that the very next day I went out and bought the band's debut album. That was the start of my journey toward heavier music – and to this day I still think 'Iron Maiden' is a heavy album!



"WHEN KISS finally took to the stage they turned out to be everything I'd hoped for – and more! They'd just brought in Eric Carr to take over from Peter Criss on drums, so it wasn't quite the classic line-up, but I didn't care! The stage show that night was huge. There seemed to be explosions happening all over the stage almost every minute, and then Ace Frehley had a guitar that fired a rocket. It was simply amazing! And I loved the fact that all four band members were larger-than-life characters.

"Nothing could really prepare me for the Kiss live experience. It was overwhelming, actually. But what really struck me was that it was such a family-friendly show. I know that sounds a little bonkers, but if you think

about the way Kiss put on their shows back then, it really did appeal to the child in all of us.

"I WENT to the venue as a Kiss fan, but left as both a Kiss and an Iron Maiden fan. And because I had so much fun seeing those two bands that night, I became hooked on going to gigs. I didn't make my mind up to become a musician after that show, but it certainly started me off as an ardent gig-goer. Because I'd made it home in one piece and hadn't been attacked by crazed bikers, my mum was OK about me going to more live shows, so I have a lot to thank Kiss and Maiden for. They started me on my journey to becoming a bona-fide metalhead!"